

## Thinking Outside the (Cracker) Box

Reading menus from child care facilities, both homes and centers, can be very monotonous work. Children are overloaded with juice and crackers.

The CACFP meal pattern requirements for breakfast include a fruit/vegetable/juice component. Did you ever wonder why juice is listed last? For small children having juice and the required fluid milk may be too much liquid at one time. Some ideas would be to serve a mixed fruit cup, orange wedges, banana slices, hot cinnamon peaches or pears, and the list could go on and on.

Too many times we hear the excuse that “licensing requires us to serve a Vitamin C food every day, so we serve Vitamin C enriched juice.” Fruits that are good sources of Vitamin C include cantaloupe, grapefruit and orange sections, kiwi fruit, mandarin orange sections, mango, strawberries, and tangerines. Try serving one of these instead of juice twice a week for breakfast.

In addition, vegetables that are good sources of Vitamin C include asparagus, broccoli, cabbage, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, red and green bell peppers, sweet potatoes, and tomatoes. You can serve these vegetables and meet the Vitamin C requirement. How many of these foods can you incorporate in your menus?

And, while we are on the subject, what about all those crackers? Sure, crackers meet the requirement (Do you check the label?), but serving them all the time certainly is uninteresting. Instead of crackers at snack time, try one of these:

- Toasted bagel or English muffin

- Biscuits

- Soft pretzels

- Cornbread or corn muffins

- Pancakes, waffles, French toast

- Various muffins made with fruits and vegetables (Have you ever served a morning glory muffin? It contains carrots and pineapple.)

- Cooked pasta, such as wagon wheels or corkscrews, to eat as a finger food

- Cooked rice served as a cereal with cinnamon and raisins.

It's time for spring cleaning. Take a look at your menus and see where you can clean out the monotony. The CACFP meal pattern requirements allow for a great deal of variety. Your kids deserve the best you can offer.